



Discussion Paper:

# 2021 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update

August 2021

## Section 4: Practices

### 4.1 Strengths

#### EYLF

The principles and practices are recognised as a strength in both Frameworks. Stakeholders’ ratings for the importance of the EYLF practices demonstrated very strong endorsement for six of these eight practices, with 89% to 98% of educators/providers other professionals rating them as extremely-very important. Notably 96% of families also rated *Learning through play* as extremely-very important.

**Table 6:** Per cent of stakeholders who rated EYLF Practices as extremely or very important

| EYLF Practices   | Educators /Approved Providers | Other Professionals |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Holistic approaches (connectedness of mind, body, spirit)                                      | 85%                           | 87%                 |
| Responsiveness to children (value and build on children’s strengths, abilities, and interests) | 98%                           | 95%                 |
| Learning through play  | 98%                           | 97%                 |
| Intentional teaching (deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful)                                  | 94%                           | 90%                 |
| Learning environments (that support learning)  | 98%                           | 96%                 |
| Cultural competence (respect, celebrate, understand, honour differences)                       | 95%                           | 92%                 |
| Continuity and transitions   | 92%                           | 89%                 |
| Assessment for learning (an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting, and evaluating)            | 80%                           | 84%                 |

*Holistic approaches* received slightly lower ratings; 85%-87% of stakeholders rated this practice as extremely-very important. There was also weaker endorsement of *Assessment for learning* by stakeholders, including families (only 60% rated this practice as extremely-very important).

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**Example comments from stakeholder feedback**

*For our family we place 'learning through play' very highly. So much research shows that play-based learning is the best for the early years. It should continue into prep and years 1-2 at Primary school too. They should be allowed to get messy, experiment, run, jump, and climb as they learn (ECEC, Parent, LDC).*

*I think the practices could be explained in greater detail and how they collectively contribute to high quality pedagogy...a 'bringing it all together' section could be an option (Focus Group).*

*Assessment for learning should be based upon the teacher/parent understanding of the child rather than a tick box exercise/test (ECEC, Parent, LDC).*

*I like playing in the sandpit though you don't have to play all day (ECEC, Child 2years 10mths)*

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## MTOP

Educators/providers and other professionals who support OSHC services were in agreement in their strong endorsement (ratings over 90%) of four of the eight MTOP Practices. Families also endorsed *Learning through play and leisure activities*; 83% rated this Practice as extremely-very important.

**Table 7.** Per cent of stakeholders who rated MTOP Practices as extremely or very important

| MTOP Practices  | Educators<br>/Approved<br>Providers | Other<br>Professionals |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Holistic approaches (connectedness of mind, body, spirit)   | 71%                                 | 84%                    |
| Collaboration with children (responsiveness to all children's strengths, abilities, interests)    | 96%                                 | 96%                    |
| Learning through play and leisure activities  | 97%                                 | 96%                    |
| Intentionality (deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful actions)                                   | 77%                                 | 84%                    |
| Environments as welcoming spaces  | 96%                                 | 96%                    |
| Cultural competence (respect, celebrate, understand, honour differences)                          | 91%                                 | 88%                    |
| Continuity and transitions (with homes, schools, community spaces)                                | 83%                                 | 83%                    |
| Evaluation for wellbeing and learning (an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting, and evaluating) | 58%                                 | 76%                    |

Children and young people noted the importance of *playing with my friends, good OSHC carers* (OSHC child, 10 years), with many drawing about their friendships.

Three of the Practices received weaker and more varied endorsement: *Holistic approaches, Intentionality, and Continuity and transitions* ratings range from 71% to 84% for extremely-very important. The greatest variation was seen in stakeholder ratings for *Evaluation for wellbeing and learning*, which received ratings of extremely-very important that ranged from 76% of other professionals to 58% of educators/providers to 31% of families.

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**Example comments from stakeholder feedback**

*Evaluations should be different in OSHC, and children should play a critical role (OSHC, Other, BSC).*

*Evaluation for wellbeing should be more of a focus than for learning (OSHC, Educational Leader, Nominated Supervisor, Educator, BSC/ASC/Vac).*

*Although after school care is a place of learning, for me it's more about support for their wellbeing, safety, social relationships, strengths, and play (OSHC, Parent, ASC).*

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## 4.2 Opportunities

Recognising the integral link between children and young people's learning, educator practices and relationships in education and care, there is opportunity to clarify, expand and update practices in both ALFs. Informed by Stage 1 feedback, and current literature, the following practices are identified as priorities for updating.

### 4.2.1 Clarify the meaning of holistic approaches

The ALFs Update includes learnings from equivalent Australian and international frameworks and reviews. Illustrating the importance of the description of holistic approaches, the New Zealand framework Te Whariki endorses this as principle two (MoE, 2017). Fleer et al., (2013, p. 6) note the concept and practice of 'holistic' approaches appeared inconsistent in ECEC reflecting disparities between "pedagogy and curriculum" within the sector. Narvanen and Elvstrand (2015) state that the holistic approaches to develop curriculum in OSHC services should include child participation. ECEC educators and approved providers have stressed the importance of strengthening the focus on holistic approaches and for more clarity in this area.

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**Example comments from stakeholder feedback**

*Strengthening holistic practices and connection between body and mind especially in terms of social and emotional learning (ECEC, Educational Leader, LDC).*

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### Points of Discussion: Practice of holistic approaches

*To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:*

- 10. Clarifying the meaning of holistic approaches to learning and teaching, including the connection between the vision, principles, practices, and learning outcomes in both frameworks.*

#### *4.2.2 Strengthen the connection between play-based learning and intentionality*

The NQF recognises children as “capable and competent learners who have agency and learn best through a play-based program” (ACECQA, Sept. 2020, p.100).

Under the NQS, educators are expected to facilitate and extend each child’s learning and development by engaging in evidence-informed practices. In the NQS, these are described broadly as intentional teaching, responsive teaching, and scaffolding, and facilitating child directed learning, which inform the practices promoted in the ALFs.

The ALFs Update ToR include strengthening coherent pathways between both ALFs and learning from equivalent Australian and international frameworks and reviews. The current practices “learning through play” and “intentional teaching” (EYLF) and “intentionality” (MTOP) could be more aligned to strengthen the coherency of both ALFs. While all educators strongly endorsed the practice of “Learning through play” research suggests that Australian educators still do not have an agreed understanding of what this is or a shared language to describe it. Educators also interpret the role of the educator in play differently (Taylor & Boyer, 2019). Closely linked to play-based learning, and an emerging theme in the EYLF surveys is better explanation of intentional teaching, and greater emphasis on the role of educators in this context. This mirrors the findings of Leggett and Ford (2013, p. 48) who found that interpretations of intentionality are sometimes blurred for educators.

There is opportunity to strengthen understanding about both play-based learning and intentionality, including the role of children/young people and educators in play and learning. This provides a platform to consider more integrated approaches to teaching and learning, valuing and promoting both child and adult-led learning. This is particularly important to consider when services are responding to the interests of older children. Play as leisure has different constructs. Palsdottir and Kristjansdottir (2017) note that the concept of leisure has the potential to underpin OSHC programs focus on creativity, fun, holistic learning and social awareness and sense of community. Yet in Australia, Hurst (2017) found that educators have a romantic notion of play, and leisure as a concept is not well understood as children and young people are often left waiting to take part in leisure experiences in OSHC. Both the surveys and the young peoples’ voices supported strengthening this practice.

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### Example comments from stakeholder feedback

*Holistic learning and learning through play need to be strengthened as it allows children to develop holistically, across and within all domains in integrated and meaningful ways (ECEC, School Principal, Preschool).*

*Varied, authentic, inquiry-based activities that tap into child's interest (ECEC, Parent, LDC)*

*Larger focus on intentionality when planning environments, gathering spaces and resourcing for multiple age groups and interests - rather than planning for experiences or traditional programming (OSHC, Approved Provider, BSC/ASC/Vac).*

*More things to do that older kids like (12 year old, OSHC).*

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### Points of Discussion: Practices of learning through play and intentional teaching/intentionality

*To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:*

- 11. Combining the practices of learning through play, intentional teaching and intentionality to reflect contemporary understandings of child and educator roles in play, teaching and learning.*

#### 4.2.3 Cultural responsiveness to replace cultural competence

The ToR for the ALFs Update require a focus on cultural competence and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and ways of knowing, doing and being as well as learning from findings and recommendations from relevant inquiries and Royal Commissions. All Australian children and young people have the right to know and value the history and current context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the story of the land on which they live (Barblett et al., 2017; Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018; Miller, 2011). Cultural competence is a recurring theme across the principles, practices, and outcomes of the EYLF and MTOP. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are diverse, so it is important to develop perspectives that are contextually relevant to the setting. Interweaving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories into education by teaching Indigenous cultures and perspectives has been identified nationally to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (DET, 2011).

The EYLF requires educators to deliver a curriculum that “celebrates the diversity in and between children, families and communities” (Adam et al., 2019, p.549). Researching and thinking in this area has moved beyond the idea of cultural competence to cultural responsiveness. For example, the Department of Education Western Australia *Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework* (2015) asks

teachers to take and teach ‘culturally responsive actions’. Cultural responsiveness is defined as “the ability to interact and communicate effectively and sensitively with people with a different background to your own with proficiency”. This is enabled by respect for culture, self-reflection, learning and a commitment to improvement of practices and relationships” (WADET, 2015, p.16). There was strong support from stakeholders throughout Stage 1 to explore the concept of cultural responsiveness.

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#### Example comments from stakeholder feedback

*A greater focus on honouring Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing and creating culturally safe places for Indigenous children and their families (ECEC, Centre Director, Nominated Supervisor, Educational Leader, LDC)*

*Extend the focus on cultural competence (Focus Group).*

*Perhaps to highlight its importance, its own dedicated point - something around Aboriginal Perspectives / Indigenous. Not to be included in the above diversity principle, but to emphasise it in that and on its own (OSHC, Others, BSC/ASC/Vac).*

*Cultural competence is the WRONG TERMINOLOGY! Competence suggests a checklist to be ticked off, when we can never be totally competent in the cultural perspectives and practices of another culture (ECEC, Centre Director, LDC).*

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#### Points of Discussion: Practice of cultural competence

*To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:*

- 12. Changing the practice of cultural competence to cultural responsiveness, which includes a genuine commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all aspects of service provision.*

#### 4.2.4 Align assessment and evaluation for learning development and wellbeing

Supporting the objective of the NQF to improve educational and developmental outcomes for children, service providers are required to implement a planned and reflective approach to assessment and planning for each child. For example, the National Law requires service providers to ‘assess’ each child’s progress against the outcomes of their educational program [in early childhood] and to ‘evaluate’ each child’s wellbeing, development and learning [in OSHC]. The NQS reinforces these requirements in Quality Area 1, Educational Program and Practice.

There is opportunity to strengthen the concepts of assessment and evaluation in the EYLF and MTOP and connect these to the planning cycle in more authentic, meaningful and transparent ways.

By doing this the Update addresses the ToR of strengthening coherent pathways between both ALFs and linking to the Australian Curriculum, as well as supporting children's success and assessment of achievement of outcomes. International frameworks also have a focus on this. *The Early Years Foundation Stage (UK) and Te Whariki (NZ) both describe assessment as ongoing and formative and "sits at the heart of effective early years practice" (EYFS, 2012 p.3).*

There is a varied understanding in ECEC services of what constitutes assessment and how the analysis of the evidence gathered through observation and documentation is relevant to the process in the planning cycle. This is demonstrated by Element 1.3.1 Assessment and Planning Cycle being not met by the highest proportion of ECEC services in Australia. Therefore, the ALFs could better support educator's understandings of effective assessment strategies.

Stage 1 consultation highlighted strong support for the Learning Outcomes (see **Table 8**) but identified challenges in understanding and implementing the requirements for assessment against the learning outcomes and related documentation. Educators and providers are seeking more specific information on assessment within the EYLF, including meaningful approaches to assessment and what should be assessed.

Harrison et al., (2019) found the design and use of formative assessment tools was a key part of educators' planning for children in the years before school, but there was little evidence that the use of assessment strategies by ECEC services impacted children's outcomes. They note that while the EYLF and The Educators' Guide (DEEWR, 2010) "direct educators to use assessment to look at individual pathways for children, liaise with families and plan integrated and meaningful opportunities and experiences for children's learning, no specific assessment tools are recommended" (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 13).

Parents in Stage 1 feedback focussed on the play, wellbeing, safety, social relationships and strengths, as a priority over assessment and cautioned against a move to formalised assessment. This does not preclude assessment practices, although cautions against more formalised assessment approaches. Keary et al., (2020) caution that top-down ECEC assessment practices are impeding inclusive practices. It is clear there is a need to build understanding about assessment practices that are authentic, reliable, and valid and do not create a deficit approach or label children. The Finnish early years framework as well as others, highlight the inclusion of assessment practices that provide children with the opportunity to review and consider their own learning.

The term assessment is not used in the MTOP. Instead, the focus is on evaluation for wellbeing and learning. In Stage 1, the majority of the OSHC educators and approved providers emphasised the challenges faced by the educators in evaluating and documenting children and young people's learning, development, and wellbeing in OSHC. Assessment and evaluation allow educators to evaluate their practice, and for children and young people to set their own goals for learning and self-assess their progress towards these goals. Survey participants reinforced the need to explore the concept of Assessment for learning/Evaluation for learning, development and well-being.

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### Example comments from stakeholder feedback

*Assessment for learning to be further unpacked so it better reflects how ECEC services plan and document children's learning such as documentation of and decision making about and for children's learning (ECEC, Centre Director, Nominated Supervisor, Educational Leader, ECT, LDC).*

*I think that this is very difficult to measure (ECEC, Parent, FDC).*

*I don't expect staff to 'assess' my child's learning - I do expect that they notice children's interests and strengths and listen to children's ideas and thoughts in order to plan their program though. Although after school care is a place of learning, for me it's more about support for their wellbeing, safety, social relationships, strengths, and play (OSHC, Parent, ASC).*

*Assessment of learning is difficult as so much is really based on educator judgement of what they child may or may not be 'learning' (ECEC, ECT, Preschool).*

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### Points of Discussion: Practices of assessment/evaluation

*To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:*

- 13. Aligning EYLF and MTOP practices to: Assessment and evaluation for learning, development, and wellbeing to reflect contemporary understandings of authentic and meaningful assessment approaches including children and young people's role in assessing their own learning.*